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BOST 6517

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COUNTRY Poland

CIA

SUBJECT Shortages in Poland

DATE 8 July 1953

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Supplement to:

Responsive to:

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Source:

1. "The shortage of bread in Poland continues to pose a serious problem for the government as well as the consumer. Reports from all areas agree that bread is exceedingly poor in quality, improperly baked, and delayed in delivery to the stores selling it.

2. "The situation is especially bad in Warsaw, where the local population must compete with large numbers coming in from suburbs all around the city where it is quite impossible to get bread. The bakeries there have been so irregular in their operation, that stores supplying bread are open at times when working people cannot buy. The result is that when they have time, on Saturdays or days before a holiday, they go to Warsaw and lay in enough bread to last a week--if they can find it.

3. "Potatoes, in years past the cheapest of all Polish food items, have been on the scarcity list for many months. In June new potatoes on the Warsaw market sold at 25 zlotys a kilo (2.2 lbs), the equivalent of seven hours earnings for the average worker. The price of old potatoes had dropped somewhat, but even so were not less than three zlotys a kilogram, and not desirable at that. All fresh vegetables are extremely high-priced and meat continues to be out of reach.

4. "Food is not alone in being hard to find or non-existent. Complaints are reported because of no soap, no tooth-paste, no buttons, no combs. Farmers were so persistent in their demands to know why the rural cooperatives did not have certain simple farm tools so necessary to the spring work that the authorities had to explain, by throwing the blame on each other's department.

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5. "Instances of arrests, trials, and sentences for theft of goods from state-owned stores or plants and sale on the black market are frequent. Sometimes it is a case involving only one person, though the amount of money and goods concerned may be significant. Sometimes it is the work of organized bands.

6. "Recently a case of the latter sort got considerable attention. A number of men employed on the construction of the Warsaw subway were so organized that they were able to divert to certain companies, quantities of building materials that private concerns could not legally obtain. This meant that prices on the black market for such materials have been exorbitant, and the workers on the subway could get handsome rewards for their theft of cement and other builder's needs.

7. "Charged and convicted, they drew prison sentences ranging from one and a half to three and a half years, plus heavy fines.

8. "A number of the managers of nationalized stores selling all kinds of paper--cardboard, stationery, art papers and the like, who had organized to take from their stocks and sell on the black market, were also tried by the same court and sentenced. Twelve persons were arrested in connection with this abuse of office, one of them the financial director in the City Retail Trade, through whose influence the speculators had been able to get consignments earlier than other store managers and sell at raised prices. One manager had been successful in disposing of three tons of paper and writing materials in this fashion.

9. "Arrests are becoming more and more frequent, by no means all of them on charges that have any basis in fact, and the old practice of arresting without making a charge continues. To encourage the members of the Security Police, the secret police, to 'carry out their duty,' the government has issued a decree giving all those receiving injury during performance of duty, 'official, political, or social,' a monthly pension, the amount depending upon the seriousness of the injury inflicted by 'an enemy of the democratic form of government.' The pension is cash, but it also carries many other priviliges. The widows of such men and minor children also are to receive monthly allowances.

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